

Research Paper

Causal Relationship Between Perceived Self-Concept and Life Satisfaction in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine gender differences in personal self-concept and satisfaction with life, as well as to explore the relationship between these variables among young adults. A total of 231 participants, including 79 males and 152 females, were assessed using standardized measures of satisfaction with life and the personal self-concept questionnaire, which includes dimensions of self-fulfilment, honesty, autonomy, and emotional self-concept. Independent samples *t*-tests revealed that female participants scored significantly higher in self-fulfilment, honesty, emotional self-concept, and overall personal self-concept compared to male participants, while no significant gender difference was found in autonomy or overall satisfaction with life. Correlation analyses indicated that, in the total sample, satisfaction with life was strongly associated with self-fulfilment and moderately related to honesty and overall personal self-concept. Separate gender analyses showed differing patterns: for males, satisfaction with life demonstrated significant positive relationships with honesty, autonomy, emotional self-concept, and total self-concept, whereas for females, satisfaction with life was significantly related to honesty, autonomy, emotional self-concept, and overall personal self-concept, but not self-fulfilment. These findings suggest that personal self-concept plays a central role in shaping life satisfaction, with emotional self-concept and honesty emerging as key determinants across genders. The results highlight the importance of fostering positive self-perceptions, emotional awareness, and authenticity in youth-focused mental health and educational programs. The study offers meaningful insights into the complex interplay between self-concept and well-being in young adults, while also emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive interventions.

Keywords: *Perceived Self-concept Life Satisfaction, Young Adults, Causal Relationship*

Young adulthood is a developmental period marked by identity exploration, emotional growth, and increasing responsibility, making it a crucial stage for understanding psychological well-being. During this phase, individuals construct their self-concept, which influences how they perceive their strengths, limitations, and

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overall identity. As Rosenberg (1979) noted, “the self-concept is the totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object.” Life satisfaction, on the other hand, represents the cognitive evaluation of one’s overall quality of life. Diener et al. (1985) highlighted that “life satisfaction is a conscious, global judgment of one’s life in which the criteria for judgment are up to the person.” Despite evidence suggesting that a positive self-concept enhances well-being, limited research has explored this relationship specifically among young adults in the contemporary socio-cultural context, where digital comparison, academic pressure, and evolving social expectations may significantly shape personal identity and happiness. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the relationship between perceived self-concept and life satisfaction in young adults, addressing an important gap in understanding the psychological factors that contribute to well-being during this crucial life stage.

Perceived self-concept refers to the individual’s subjective evaluation of their own abilities, characteristics, emotions, values, and overall identity. It includes how a person sees themselves across multiple dimensions—such as emotional, social, personal, and academic aspects—and reflects the level of confidence, worth, and clarity they hold about who they are (Rosenberg, 1979). Life satisfaction refers to a person’s cognitive and global evaluation of the quality of their life according to their chosen standards. It reflects the degree to which individuals feel content with various aspects of life and perceive their overall well-being positively (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985).

Research over the past decades consistently highlights the association between self-concept and life satisfaction among young adults. Rosenberg (1979) emphasized that individuals with higher levels of self-worth tend to experience greater subjective well-being. Diener et al. (1985) further noted that life satisfaction is influenced significantly by internal self-perceptions and emotional evaluations.

Several contemporary studies support this relationship. Joshanloo and Jovanović (2016) reported that positive self-concept predicts higher life satisfaction by fostering emotional stability and resilience. Similarly, Kong and You (2013) found that adolescents and young adults with stronger self-concept demonstrated better psychological adjustment and greater satisfaction with life. A study by Moksnes and Espnes (2013) indicated that self-esteem and self-concept clarity significantly contribute to life satisfaction among youth, suggesting that individuals who understand and accept themselves tend to experience greater well-being.

Further evidence comes from Arslan (2019), who found that self-concept and self-esteem were strong predictors of life satisfaction among university students, highlighting those cognitive evaluations of self-worth directly influence happiness. Additionally, Wang and Kong (2014) observed that emotional self-concept plays a key role in determining subjective well-being, as individuals who perceive themselves as emotionally competent often report higher levels of life satisfaction.

Cross-cultural studies also reveal consistent patterns. Schütz, Archer, and Garcia (2013) demonstrated that self-concept clarity positively relates to life satisfaction across diverse cultural groups. Moreover, Heffer and Willoughby (2017) found that excessive social comparison on digital platforms can negatively distort self-concept and reduce overall life satisfaction among young adults, indicating the growing relevance of self-perception in modern contexts.

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Overall, the literature indicates that perceived self-concept is closely linked to life satisfaction, with higher self-concept generally predicting greater subjective well-being. However, variations may exist across cultural, social, and developmental contexts, making it essential to examine this relationship in specific populations of young adults.

Young adulthood is a significant developmental phase in which individuals actively form their identities, evaluate personal strengths, and assess their subjective well-being. Research consistently shows that perceived self-concept plays a critical role in shaping emotional stability, coping ability, and psychological outcomes (Rosenberg, 1979; Moksnes & Espnes, 2013). Life satisfaction, a central component of subjective well-being, is influenced by one's internal evaluations and self-perceptions, as highlighted by Diener et al. (1985). In recent years, young adults have faced increasing pressures related to academic performance, career expectations, social comparison on digital platforms, and rapid socio-cultural changes. These factors can significantly modify how young people perceive themselves and how satisfied they feel with their lives (Heffer & Willoughby, 2017). Although several studies have shown a positive relationship between self-concept and life satisfaction, findings remain inconsistent across cultural contexts. Given these changing psychosocial dynamics and the importance of self-perception in shaping well-being, it is crucial to explore this relationship specifically among young adults. The present study is therefore justified as it aims to contribute to understanding the psychological determinants of life satisfaction and to inform mental health interventions, counseling practices, and youth development programs.

Existing literature suggests a strong association between self-concept and life satisfaction; however, much of this work has centered on Western populations, leaving limited empirical evidence regarding young adults in the Indian socio-cultural context (Kong & You, 2013; Schütz, Archer, & Garcia, 2013). Additionally, earlier studies primarily focused on self-esteem or self-concept clarity rather than multidimensional perceived self-concept. Contemporary variables such as digital social comparison, shifting educational pressures, and new identity challenges have also not been sufficiently integrated into earlier research models (Heffer & Willoughby, 2017). Moreover, most studies have examined adolescents or general adult populations, with fewer focusing specifically on young adults aged 18–25, who are navigating critical identity-forming experiences. This lack of culturally sensitive, age-specific, and multidimensional investigation marks a clear research gap. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by examining the relationship between perceived self-concept and life satisfaction among young adults, offering contemporary and contextually relevant insights that are missing in existing literature. So the objective of the study is, 1) to examine the relationship between personal self-concept and satisfaction with life among young adults, 2) To study the effect of gender on personal self-concept life satisfaction in young adults.

Hypothesis:

- There will be a significant relationship between personal self-concept and satisfaction with life among young adults.
- There will be significant effect of gender on personal self-concept and satisfaction with life among young adults.

METHOD

Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationship between perceived self-concept and life satisfaction among young adults.

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Sample

A total sample of 231 participants was selected using the random sampling method, consisting of 152 female students and 79 male students. The study included specific inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the suitability of participants. The inclusion criteria required that participants be literate young adults between the ages of 16 and 30 years, have no history of medical or psychological illness, be in a stable mental state at the time of data collection, and be willing to voluntarily participate in the study. The exclusion criteria involved individuals with a history of medical or psychological illness, those who did not fall within the specified age range, and those who were unwilling to participate. These criteria ensured that the sample comprised healthy young adults capable of providing reliable and accurate responses for the purpose of the research.

Tools

- **The Personal Self-Concept Questionnaire (Goni 2009):** This scale is developed by Goñi in 2009 and later refined by Goñi and colleagues in 2011, consists of 18 items that assess four domains of personal self-concept: Self-fulfilment, Autonomy, Honesty, and Emotional Self-concept. The scale uses a Likert-type rating format, typically ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The PSCQ demonstrates high internal consistency, with reliability coefficients generally falling between 0.80 and 0.90, and it shows strong construct validity, supported through factor-analytic evidence and correlations with related measures of psychological functioning.
- **The Satisfaction with Life Scale:** It is developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin in 1985, consists of 5 items designed to measure an individual's global cognitive judgment of life satisfaction. The scale uses a 7-point Likert-type rating format, ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. The SWLS demonstrates high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values typically reported between 0.80 and 0.90, indicating strong internal consistency. It also possesses strong construct and convergent validity, supported through factor analysis and significant correlations with other measures of subjective well-being and psychological health.

Procedure

The data collection process began after obtaining prior approval from the University Head and securing the necessary administrative permissions to conduct the study. Once approval was granted, the researcher contacted potential participants and provided them with a brief explanation of the purpose, objectives, and nature of the study. Participants were informed about confidentiality, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Those who agreed to participate were then provided with a written informed consent form, which they signed before beginning the assessment. The questionnaires were administered either individually or in small groups, ensuring a quiet and comfortable environment. After the participants completed the scales, the researcher carefully checked all responses for completeness and accuracy. The collected data were then systematically coded and entered into a computer for statistical processing. Finally, the data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to obtain descriptive and inferential statistics relevant to the objectives of the study.

RESULTS

The present study examined gender differences in satisfaction with life and various dimensions of personal self-concept among university students. Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare male and female participants on each psychological variable.

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For satisfaction with life, the results indicated that female students ($M = 21.13$, $SD = 6.11$) reported slightly higher life satisfaction compared to male students ($M = 19.90$, $SD = 6.39$). However, the difference was not statistically significant, [$t(229) = -1.439$, $p > .05$], suggesting that both genders experienced similar levels of overall life satisfaction. In terms of self-fulfilment, a significant gender difference emerged. Female students ($M = 20.76$, $SD = 3.55$) scored significantly higher than male students ($M = 19.70$, $SD = 3.63$), [$t(229) = -2.146$, $p < .05$]. This indicates that female students perceived themselves as more capable of achieving personal goals and deriving meaning from their activities. A significant difference was also found in the dimension of honesty, with female students ($M = 12.10$, $SD = 1.90$) scoring higher than male students ($M = 11.51$, $SD = 2.67$), [$t(229) = -1.948$, $p < .05$].

Table 1: Mean, SD and t-value of satisfaction with life and personal self-concept in terms of gender.

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Satisfaction with Life	Male	79	19.9	6.394	-1.439
	Female	152	21.13	6.115	
Self-Fulfilments	Male	79	19.7	3.637	-2.146*
	Female	152	20.76	3.552	
Honesty	Male	79	11.51	2.669	-1.948*
	Female	152	12.1	1.904	
Autonomy	Male	79	10.92	3.304	0.415
	Female	152	10.71	3.678	
Emotional Self-Concept	Male	79	16.22	3.288	-2.964**
	Female	152	17.45	2.833	
Personal Self-Concept	Male	79	58.33	8.4	-2.628**
	Female	152	61.02	6.773	

Note** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

These findings suggest that females tended to appraise themselves more positively in terms of sincerity and truthfulness. For Autonomy, no significant gender difference is observed. Male students ($M = 10.92$, $SD = 3.30$) and female students ($M = 10.71$, $SD = 3.67$) are not differ statistically, [$t(229) = 0.415$, $p > .05$]. This indicates that both groups perceived themselves as equally capable of independent decision-making and self-governance. A gender difference is found in emotional self-concept, where female students ($M = 17.45$, $SD = 2.83$) reported significantly higher emotional awareness and emotional regulation compared to male students ($M = 16.22$, $SD = 3.29$), [$t(229) = -2.964$, $p < .01$]. Finally, the composite score of personal self-concept revealed a significant gender difference. Female students ($M = 61.02$, $SD = 6.77$) demonstrated higher overall personal self-concept than male students ($M = 58.33$, $SD = 8.40$), [$t(229) = -2.628$, $p < .01$]. This suggests that females generally evaluated themselves more positively across self-fulfilment, honesty, autonomy, and emotional self-perception.

Table 2: Correlation coefficient between satisfaction with life and personal self- concept in young adults

	Self-fulfilment	Honesty	Autonomy	Emotional self-concept	Personal self-concept
Satisfaction with life (Overall)	.623**	.150*	.034	.070	.391**
Satisfaction with life (Male Participants)	.116	.404*	.242*	.498**	.469**
Satisfaction with life (Female Participants)	-.133	.334**	.202*	.424**	.311**

Note**p<.01, *p<.05

Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients between satisfaction with life and different dimensions of personal self-concept among young adults. For the overall sample, satisfaction with life showed a strong and significant positive correlation with self-fulfilment ($r = .623, p < .01$), indicating that individuals who reported higher life satisfaction also tended to perceive themselves as more capable of realizing personal goals. A small but significant positive relationship was also found with honesty ($r = .150, p < .05$) and a moderate positive correlation with overall personal self-concept ($r = .391, p < .01$). However, the correlations with autonomy ($r = .034$) and emotional self-concept ($r = .070$) were low and statistically non-significant, suggesting that these dimensions were not strongly associated with life satisfaction at the group level.

When correlations were examined separately for male participants, a different pattern emerged. Among males, satisfaction with life was significantly and positively correlated with honesty ($r = .404, p < .05$), autonomy ($r = .242, p < .05$), emotional self-concept ($r = .498, p < .01$), and overall personal self-concept ($r = .469, p < .01$). The relationship with self-fulfilment was positive but non-significant ($r = .116$). These findings suggest that for males, life satisfaction is more closely linked with honesty, independence, emotional stability, and overall positive self-view than with self-fulfilment.

For female participants, satisfaction with life showed a significant negative correlation with self-fulfilment ($r = -.133$), although this relationship was not statistically significant. In contrast, significant positive correlations were found with honesty ($r = .334, p < .01$), autonomy ($r = .202, p < .05$), emotional self-concept ($r = .424, p < .01$), and overall personal self-concept ($r = .311, p < .01$). This indicates that females with higher satisfaction with life are more likely to perceive themselves as honest, autonomous, emotionally aware, and possessing a strong personal self-concept.

Major Findings

1. Female participants scored significantly higher than male participants in self-fulfilment, honesty, emotional self-concept, and overall personal self-concept.
2. No significant gender difference was found in satisfaction with life and autonomy.
3. In the overall sample, satisfaction with life showed a strong positive correlation with self-fulfilment and a moderate positive correlation with honesty and total personal self-concept.
4. Autonomy and emotional self-concept were not significantly correlated with satisfaction with life in the combined sample.

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5. Among male participants, satisfaction with life showed significant positive correlations with honesty, autonomy, emotional self-concept, and overall personal self-concept.
6. For males, self-fulfilment did not significantly correlate with satisfaction with life.
7. Among female participants, satisfaction with life demonstrated significant positive correlations with honesty, autonomy, emotional self-concept, and overall personal self-concept.
8. For females, self-fulfilment did not show a significant relationship with satisfaction with life and was slightly negatively correlated.
9. Emotional self-concept emerged as a strong predictor of life satisfaction for both male and female participants.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine gender differences in personal self-concept and satisfaction with life, as well as the relationship between life satisfaction and different dimensions of personal self-concept among young adults. The findings revealed that female participants reported significantly higher levels of self-fulfilment, honesty, emotional self-concept, and overall personal self-concept compared to male participants. These results align with previous research suggesting that females often demonstrate higher emotional awareness, self-reflection, and internalized self-evaluations (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013; Mahalik et al., 2005). The absence of significant gender differences in autonomy and satisfaction with life supports earlier findings indicating that life satisfaction tends to remain relatively stable across genders in young adulthood (Diener et al., 1999). The correlation analysis further highlighted important patterns. In the overall sample, satisfaction with life was strongly positively associated with self-fulfilment and moderately related to honesty and total personal self-concept. This suggests that individuals who perceive themselves as achieving personal goals and maintaining authenticity tend to experience greater well-being, consistent with humanistic theories emphasizing congruence and self-actualization (Rogers, 1961). Interestingly, autonomy and emotional self-concept did not correlate significantly with life satisfaction at the group level, indicating that these dimensions may contribute differently across genders. Gender-specific correlations revealed differing psychological mechanisms. Among male participants, satisfaction with life showed significant positive correlations with honesty, autonomy, emotional self-concept, and overall personal self-concept. This pattern suggests that for males, independence, emotional management, and self-consistency may be more central to life satisfaction. Previous studies have reported that men often place greater emphasis on autonomy and emotional regulation as part of their identity and well-being (Oyserman et al., 2002). Among female participants, satisfaction with life was significantly associated with honesty, autonomy, emotional self-concept, and overall personal self-concept, but not with self-fulfilment. This indicates that women's life satisfaction may be more influenced by emotional awareness, interpersonal authenticity, and holistic self-evaluations. The strong correlation with emotional self-concept aligns with research suggesting that emotional clarity and emotional expression are important predictors of well-being among women (Barrett et al., 2001). Overall, the findings suggest that personal self-concept—particularly honesty, emotional self-concept, and total self-concept—is a significant determinant of life satisfaction in young adults. However, the differing patterns across genders highlight the need to consider gender-specific developmental and socio-cultural factors that shape self-perception and well-being.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that while satisfaction with life does not differ significantly between males and females, females exhibit higher levels of several personal self-concept dimensions, including self-fulfilment, honesty, emotional self-concept, and overall personal self-concept. Life satisfaction is positively associated with multiple dimensions of self-concept, though the specific patterns vary across gender groups. Among males, autonomy and emotional self-concept play a stronger role, whereas among females, emotional clarity and honesty show stronger associations. These findings highlight the multidimensional nature of personal self-concept and underscore its importance in understanding well-being among young adults. The results contribute to existing literature by demonstrating both shared and gender-specific pathways linking self-concept and life satisfaction.

Limitations and Implications

The findings of the study imply that personal self-concept plays a crucial role in determining life satisfaction among young adults, highlighting the importance of fostering positive self-perceptions during this developmental stage. The strong associations between emotional self-concept, honesty, and overall self-concept with life satisfaction suggest that counseling and mental health services should incorporate strategies that strengthen emotional awareness, authenticity, and personal identity. The gender-specific patterns observed in the study further indicate that interventions may be more effective when they are sensitively tailored to address the unique psychological needs of males and females. Educational institutions and youth development programs may also utilize these findings to design workshops and training modules aimed at enhancing emotional skills, self-reflection, and personal growth. Overall, the study emphasizes the relevance of positive psychology approaches in promoting well-being and suggests that self-concept enhancement could serve as a practical pathway to improving life satisfaction among young adults.

Despite its meaningful findings, the study is limited by its reliance on a cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to draw causal inferences between personal self-concept and life satisfaction. The sample was drawn exclusively from young adults, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader age groups or diverse socio-cultural contexts. Self-report measures were used for data collection, and these may be influenced by social desirability, subjective bias, or participants' momentary emotional states. Additionally, the uneven gender distribution, with a larger number of female participants, may have influenced the gender-based comparisons. The study also did not consider other potential factors such as socio-economic status, family environment, or academic pressures, which might interact with self-concept and well-being. Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, more diverse samples, and multi-method assessments to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between personal self-concept and life satisfaction.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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